

Devotions – February 12-18, 2017

By Pastor Ann Gonyea
Eden Lutheran Church, Munising, MI

Sunday, February 12, 2017

Text: Deuteronomy 30:16

If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.

The covenant reiterated ... God restates the covenantal promise made with the people (us by extension) on several occasions. And as I read this version of the covenant in this week's lectionary from Deuteronomy, the preposition "by" catches my attention. It is not "until" or "after" or "upon" doing the commandments of God that we are blessed with the promises of the covenant. Rather it is "by" doing all of this we receive this blessing ... blessed with descendants, blessed with land, blessed to be a blessing. God commands these things for our great benefit, not God's. I find that to be very convincing evidence that God is always conspiring for our greatest good.

Let us pray: *Gracious God, your commanded way is life to us. We praise you for that gift and ask that you make us beacons of that truth this and every day. Amen.*



Monday, February 13, 2017

Text: Psalm 119:10

With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments.

My whole heart ... Sometimes we get may get a sideways glance when we pray for things as big and audacious as world peace, safe homes for all refugees, a world free of tyrants, basic needs of every human being met. But then we don't think twice when we pray with the Psalmist that we seek God and obey God's commandments with whole hearts. We know in truth we saints and sinners cannot possibly give our whole hearts. I say we take this as license to keep at these bold prayers.

Let us pray: *God of all possibility, you ask great things of us and we fall short. And yet, you love us through it and urge us to keep trying; urge us to keep striving to give you our whole hearts. And so that is our prayer, God. We pray that we are able to give you our whole hearts. And we*

also pray for peace in this world. We pray for an end to oppression and hunger, nakedness, disease, loneliness, and our own sin. Use us to make it so. Amen.



Tuesday, February 14, 2017

Text: Deuteronomy 23:24-25

If you go into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes, as many as you wish, but you shall not put any in a container. If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain.

At synagogue on the south side of Chicago, the congregation has turned much of their lawn into vegetable gardens that supply food pantries within a couple of miles around them. After just a few years of starting this ministry, they were distributing 5,000 pounds of fresh produce. And then they started a gleaning project too. In some of the community gardens near them, gardeners were asked to place a white rock on their garden plot if they were OK with people from the synagogue coming in at the end of the week and gleaning items ready for harvest. That practice comes from biblical examples like this one from Deuteronomy. The gleaning project added another 5,000 pounds of produce for the food pantries. Thanks be to God for these ministries and our biblical teachings on how to care for the hungry.

Let us pray: *Nourishing God, your abundance is enough to benefit all of creation. Unfortunately we sometimes get in our own way and cause distribution problems. Help us see those places, God, and then work through us to open your gifts to all. Make our very lives gardens worthy of and open to gleaning, for we are freed to do so in our salvation through your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*



Wednesday, February 15, 2017

Text: Proverbs 2:3-5

**if you indeed cry out for insight,
and raise your voice for understanding;
if you seek it like silver,
and search for it as for hidden treasures—
then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.**

Two things really stand out to me in these versus from Proverbs this week. (1) God wants us to seek understanding and insight into who God is, and (2) it takes some time and effort to do that.

As I think about these things, I am reminded how thankful I am to work in ministry through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a church body that wholly encourages people to study scripture, to wrestle with it and to do so for our whole lives so that we may gain insight and understanding of our Almighty Creator and God.

Let us pray: *God, you created us with hearts that long to be near you and brains that can seek to understand you. Accompany us on our life-long seeking of you. Thank you for communities that study your Word together. Let it shine through us and illuminate your love. Amen.*



Thursday, February 16, 2017

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:23-24

“All things are lawful,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other.

In a recent newspaper column I wrote:

“Ballerinas, moms and dad, doctors and teachers, paleontologist librarians, etc. They all seek to create something – movement, life itself, better health, better minds, better understanding of where we come from. Even a firefighter when you think about it, strives to create. He or she is trained to stop destruction and take the first steps toward creating something new from those ashes. There's a lot of power in this way we are hard-wired as co-creators, and so I've determined to give it more weight in the way I view and discern the world around me. It still starts with the two great teachings common to so many religious expressions – to love God above all other gods (and there are a lot of them out there), and to love and serve my neighbor. I am also compelled to ask: Does this choice, does this policy, does this law, does this viewpoint, does this action seek to create or destroy?

Let us pray: *Law-giving God, your law is imbued with the Holy Spirit. It is good and perfect law for the human walk. Guide us in our own law-making, in our law-review, in our law-enforcement. Let human law also be imbued by your Spirit, for the sake of your Creation. Amen.*



Friday, February 17, 2017

Text: Leviticus 6:2a

When any of you sin and commit a trespass against the Lord...

As we begin to turn our eye to the season of Lent, I think it's worth pausing to remember that right from the very beginning of our scriptures, our sin is explained as something we cannot escape, but at the same time, something for which God promises continual forgiveness. Our times and rituals around confession and forgiveness have changed over time ... thankfully. We don't bring small and large animals to church to sacrifice at the altar. But for those Leviticus first instructed, it certainly was a very tangible symbol of that free-flowing forgiveness from God.

Let us pray: *Forgiving God, your promise of continual freedom from our sins became our reality in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the cornerstone of our lives. Prevent us from reciting words of confession and forgiveness as though they were instructions for operating a waffle maker. Point us toward our very tangible symbols of your free-flowing forgiveness – our baptismal waters and communion feast. Amen.*



Saturday, February 18, 2017

Text: Psalm 119:33-34

Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end.

Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.

The Psalmist prays a timeless prayer for us in Psalm 119. We still must turn to God for help to resist our selfish impulses and our vanities; we still must turn to God to help us to not only walk in God's law, but to delight in it. Just after these verses in Psalm 119, we read “Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise” (verse 41).

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!” punctuates our year in the Gospel of Matthew. And so although we may have cause for lament at times in our lives and although we still find resonating words of truth in the Psalmist's prayer, we also go forth knowing that, as followers of Jesus, God has already begun to answer that prayer for salvation.

Let us pray: *Sanctifying God, you boldly stay true to your promises; you lean an attentive and loving ear to our cries for your mercy. We thank you for that, God. And we ask that our lives bear witness to this care you give us and to the amazing response you have made to our prayer for salvation, our Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen*

